DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 020 CE 048 459

AUTHOR Muench, Karen E.
TITLE A Comparative Study of the Psychosocial Needs of Adult Men and Women Students in an Adult Degree Program.
PUB DATE Oct 87
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Washington, DC, October 1987). Document has broken dot matrix print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Students; *College Students; *Females; Higher Education; *Males; Needs Assessment; *Psychological Patterns; *Student Attitudes; Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Understanding the problems adults experience when they return to college campuses has received considerable research attention in the last two decades. The psychosocial concerns of returning adult women students frequently have been identified, but little research has focused on the psychosocial concerns of returning adult men students. A study compared the psychosocial concerns of men and women adult students enrolled in an adult degree program at a small privately owned liberal arts college in the Midwest. Data were collected by surveying 158 returning adult men and women students through a mailed questionnaire. The questionnaire asked for demographic information and information pertinent to psychosocial concerns. It was returned by 90 (57 percent) of the students. Findings indicated that both men and women adult students have psychosocial concerns. Self-doubt, guilt, lack of self-confidence, and the fear of failure and of not finishing a baccalaureate degree were identified as concerns for both men and women students. The findings should enable adult educators to interact more effectively in the classroom with adult learners of both genders. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED287020

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF ADULT MEN AND WOMEN STUDENTS IN AN ADULT DEGREE PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-OSHKOSH

Karen E. Muench

Assistant Professor

Department of Human Services and Professional Leadership

ABSTRACT

Understanding the problems adult experience when they return to college campuses has received considerable research attention in the last two decades. The psychosocial concerns of particularly returning adult women students have frequently been identified. Little research has focused on the psychosocial concerns of returning adult men students. This study compared the psychosocial concerns of both men and women adult students enrolled in as adult degree program at a small privately owned liberal arts college. Findings indicated both men and women adult students have psychosocial concerns. Analysis of the data has produced findings which should enable adult educators to interact more effectively in the classroom with adult learners of both genders.

CE048459

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K Muench

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF ADULT MEN AND WOMEN STUDENTS IN AN ADULT DEGREE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The literature is replete with research studies identifying the psychosocial concerns of returning adult women students. Psychosocial concerns such as guilt (Anderson, 1974; Astin,1976; Kaplan, 1981; Letchworth, 1970; Markus, 1973), lack of self-confidence (Geisler & Thrush, 1975; Kaplan, 1981; Letchworth, 1970) role conflict (Anderson, 1974; Kirk & Dorfman, 1983; Letchworth, 1970; Rogers, 1976), fears of inferiority or isolation (Letchworth, 1970; Manis & Mochizuki, 1972) fear of taking risks and a feeling of dependency (Manis & Mochizuki, 1972) and lack of identity, (Adelstein, Sedlacek & Martinez. 1979; Amstey, 1977; Anderson, 1974; Astin, 1976; Badenhoop & Johansen, 1981; Blaukopf, 1981, Brandenburg, 1974; Durchholz & O'Conner, 1973; Kirk & Dorfman, 1983; Letchworth, 1970) have been the most frequently cited psychosocial concerns of returning adult women students.

Few studies have even mentioned the psychosocial concerns of returning adult men students. Men have been considered the "norm" on college campuses. The 1970's and 1980's brought a flux

of older women students to college campuses. The Bureau of the Census of the U.S. Department of Commerce (1972) reported there was a total of 1,102,000 women students over 25 years of age who had returned to some level of education. This phenomenon was attributed to the advent of the women's movement and thus the changing roles of women in society (Coggins, 1986, Cross, 1981; Scott, 1980), affirmative action in business and industry (Scott, 1980), technological advances (Coggins, 1986), rising educational levels of the populace, early retirement, civil rights and changing lifestyles (Cross, 1981). As women chose the educational setting to make changes in their lives, researchers began to study them.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Educational institutions have a vested interest in attracting and then retaining both adult men and women students to their college campuses. As the number of traditional college age students continues to dwindle, colleges in order to keep financially afloat need to replace them with older men as well as women students. Suggestions to help meet the needs of returning women students can be found in the literature (Astin, 1976; Geisler & Thrush, 1975; and Nero, 1976; Westervelt, 1973). Schmidt (1982) referred to problems of both genders of adult

students. He did not, however, address the problems of only men students.

The present study was conducted to determine whether men had similar psychosocial concerns. Gender comparisons were made. Psychosocial concerns such as guilt, lack of confidence and feelings of inferiority were related to demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, ethnic background and number of semesters on campus.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected by surveying 158 returning adult men and women students enrolled in an adult degree program at a small liberal arts campus in the Midwest. Ninety or fifty-seven percent of the students responded. A questionnaire and a stamped, self-addressed envelope were mailed to each student. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part provided demographic information. The second part focused on questions pertinent to psychosocial concerns. Analysis included compilation of data by frequency distribution and percentages, the chi-square statistic and the phi coefficient.

THE SAMPLE

The sample was comprised of ninety returning adult students.

Fifty-six or 62% were male and thirty-four or 38% were female. The average age was 36.6 years. Eighty-six percent were white and the remaining 14% were minorities (Black, 11%; Hispanics, 1%; American Indians, 2%). Most of the sample (93%) worked full-time and were enrolled in six credits or two courses per semester. Seventy-three percent were married, 16% were single, and 11% were separated or divorced. Seventy-six percent of the sample had children. Eighty-nine percent reported they had support from their significant others while 11% reported they did not have support. Forty percent of the sample were enrolled in their first semester of classes. Sixty percent had been enrolled for anywhere between two and nine semesters.

FINDINGS

The focus of the study was to determine if men experienced psychosocial concerns and to compare their responses to women. Table 1 provides the results of the analysis of the number of male and female respondents with psychosocial concerns. Self-doubt, guilt, lack of self-confidence and fears such as of failure and not finishing a baccalaureate degree were identified as psychosocial concerns for both men and women students. More men than women experienced lack of self-confidence. More women than men experienced guilt. A large percentage of both men and women had self-doubt. In addition, an almost equal number of

both genders experienced fear.

Psychosocial concerns were cross tabulated with demographic variables. The chi-square statistic indicated a statistically significant relationship (X^2:1,n=87:4.06;P<.05) between guilt and age in both men and women. Table 2 shows that in this study, the younger male and female students between the ages of 23 and 35 experienced more guilt than the older students between the ages of 36 and 56.

The corrected chi square statistic adjusted for small numbers indicated there was a statistically significant relationship (X^2:1,n=54:4.25;P<.05) between experiencing fear and age in male students. The results in Table 3 suggest that more younger male students experienced fear than the older male students.

When psychosocial concerns were cross tabulated with demographic variables for only the women students, the chi square statistic did not reveal any significant findings. The phi coefficient indicated, however, there was a moderate relationship between several variables. Guilt and age (phi=.34203) were related. In this study the younger female students (n=13) experienced more guilt than the older female students (n=19).

The phi coefficient also indicated a relationship between

self-confidence and age (phi=.37970) and self-doubt and age (phi=.38799). Younger women students had both less self-confidence and more self-doubt.

DISCUSSION

Women Students

For almost two decades now, researchers have identified the psychosocial concerns of returning adult women students. This study supported that body of research. This study also revealed that there is a relationship between age and some psychosocial concerns of returning women students. Younger women students were more apt to experience guilt, lack of self-confidence and self-doubt. Young women students reported they felt guilty about studying too much ,not spending enough time on housework or with family or friends, their inability to parent under stress and spending money on school.

They had self-doubts about self-discipline, their ability to get a different job after they received their degrees and their ability to pass. They lacked confidence about their intellectual abilities, getting good grades, giving oral presentations and

handling their different roles.

It is possible that the younger women students experience more guilt, lack of self-confidence, and self-doubt because they are beginning their careers and their families at the same time. They may be feeling the pressures of trying to have it all---both a career and a family.

Men Students

It is also important to note that this study revealed that men as well as women adult students have psychosocial concerns. Surprisingly, almost 75% of the men in the sample (n=56) reported they had self-doubts and a lack of self-confidence. In addition, almost 60% experienced some fears; while almost 50% reported feelings of guilt.

Men reported they had doubts about their own ability, what to major in, whether they would be able to handle multiple roles and their classes, and if they could stretch their finances. They lacked confidence in their ability to study, to do satisfactory coursework, to pass exams, to do math, and to plan their work. They felt guilty about not spending enough time with their family, not managing their time efficiently, spending money on themselves and not giving enough attention to their jobs.

Young men in particular experienced fears such as not graduating, doing unsatisfactory work, failing, losing their jobs, and not being able to handle it all.

It is possible that more younger male students experience guilt and fear than older male students because they too were trying to have it all. Many of the young men were trying to move up the career ladder. Their average age was 36.6 years. They were cognizant that now was the time to realize career dreams. In order to get promoted or even transfer to another company, they needed the undergraduate degree. Many had young families or were beginning families. So in a sense, they too were trying to balance it all and to have it all.

Results clearly indicate that both genders have psychosocial concerns when returning to higher education. Both genders feel guilty, lack self-confidence, have self-doubts, and fears. Both have difficulties juggling the roles of student, worker and family member. Returning to higher education is no easy task for both genders. What is being done at educational institutions to address the psychosocial concerns of adult men and women students?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Educational institutions should plan their programs to readily meet the needs of both genders. Results of a recent study (Hu,1985) found that the success of older students on

college campuses greatly depended on academic advising, career guidance and counseling designed to raise the confidence level of returning adult students. This study revealed that both genders do lack self-confidence when they return to higher education. Adult educators should design their classroom activities around building the self-confidence of their adult students. They should plan small group work to give adult students the opportunity to interact with other students. Small group activity is important especially to first semester returning adult students. Usually their anxiety level is very high. The more their psychosocial concerns are addressed in the beginning weeks in their first semester on campus, the more likely they will continue their studies and remain on college campuses. Small group work can help adult students realize they are not alone with their psychosocial concerns.

Adult educators should also allow adult students to actively participate in the teaching-learning process. For example, adult students should be encouraged to lead class discussions. They should be encouraged to share life experiences pertinent to classroom topics. They should be welcomed by an atmosphere of acceptance. In this way, they can feel valued and can proceed with the excitement of learning. In return, they can gain self-confidence, remove some self-doubt, alleviate some guilt and have less fear about the educational endeavor.

Table 1

Percentage of Adult Men and Women Students with Psychosocial Concerns

Psychosocial Concerns	N	Percentage of Whole Sample N=90	Percentage of Men Only N=56	Percentage of Women Only N=34
Self-Doubt	88	73%	73%	74%
Guilt	90	49%	46%	53%
Lack of Self-Confidence	90	69%	75%	59%
Fear of Failure or Not Finishing and other Fears	90	58%	57%	59%

Table 2

The Relationship Between Guilt and Age of Both Men and Women Students

	Younger Students (Ages 23-35)	Older Students (Ages 36-56)	Total
No Guilt	15	30	45
Guilt	23	19	42
Total	38	49	87

Table 3

The Relationship Between Age and Fear of Male Students Only

	Younger Male Students (Ages 23-35)	Older Male Students (Ages 36-56)	Total
Fear	18	13	31
No Fear	6	17	23
Total	24	30	54

REFERENCES

Adelstein, D., Sedlacek, W., Martinez, A. (1979). Dimensions underlying the characteristics and needs of returning women students. Research Report, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Amstey, F. H. (1977). The relationship between continuing education and identity in adult women. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Rochester, Rochester, N. Y.

Anderson, D. (1974). Supervised study: Personal development for mature female students. ERIC document, Educational Resource Information Center, ED 101766.

Astin, H. (1976). Continuing education and the development of the adult women. The Counseling Psychologist,6, 55-60.

Badenhoop, M.S., Johansen, M.K.(1980). Do re-entry women have special needs? Psychology of Women Quarterly, Summer, 591-595.

Blaukopf, P.(1981). The impact of life change events on women's

decisions to return to college. Paper presented at the National Adult Education Conference, Anaheim, CA.

Brandenburg, J.B. (1974). The needs of women returning to school. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 53, 11-18.

Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1973). Opportunities for women in higher educatiion. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.

Coggins, Chere. (1986). The adult learner on campus. Wisconsin Ideas,4, 12-13.

Durchholz, P., O'Conner, J. (1973). Why do women go back to college? Change Magazine,5, 52-62.

Geisler, M.P., Thrush, R.S. (1975). Counseling experiences and needs of older women students. Journal of the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors,39, 3-8.

Hu, M. (1985). Determining the needs and attitudes of non-traditional students. College and University, 60, 201-209.

Kaplan, S.R. (1981). A feminist Cinderella tale: Why women over age 30 want to attend graduate and professional school and what happens to them. Paper presented at the National

Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors Convention, San Francisco, CA.

Kirk , C.F., and Dorfman, L.T. (1983). Satisfaction and role-strain among middle-age and older re-entry women students. Educational Gerontology, 9, (1), 15-29.

Letchworth, G.E. (1970). Women who return to college: An identity-integrity approach. Journal of College Student Personnel, 11, 103-106.

Manis, L.G., Mochizuki, J. (1972). Search for fulfillment: A program for adult women. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 50, 594-597.

Markus,H. (1973).Continuing education for women: Factors influencing a return to school and the school experience. ERIC Document, Educational Resource Informational Center, ED 078 296.

Nero, S.R. (1976). An exploratory study of the sociological and psychological impact on mid-career changes of women. ERIC Document, Reproduction Services. No. ED 929 567.

Rogers, J. C. (1976). Role conflicts of college women. ERIC Document Reproduction Service. No. ED 126 823.

Schmidt, S.D. (1982). Characteristics and problems of adult students returning to higher education. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Scott, Nancy A. (1980). Returning women students: A review of research and descriptive studies. National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors. Washington D.C.

Westervelt, Esther Manning (1973). Major contributions:A tide in the affairs of women: The psychological impact of feminism on educated women. The Counseling Psychologist,4, 3-26.